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CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

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CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE KALININGRAD REGION: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Since the accession of Poland and Lithuania to the EU, the nature, forms and content of their border cooperation with the Kaliningrad region have fundamentally changed. There is a tendency towards strengthening the neighborhood policy. The already gained extensive and varied experience of the participation of the Kaliningrad region in the INTERREG Programme contributed to the socio-economic development of the region. The new financial tools should be linked to the regional development strategies of the neighboring territories. Efficient use of both Russian and the EU funds will help develop a new technology for regional development of North-West Russia.

Key words: the Kaliningrad region, cross-border cooperation, the European Union (EU), the Interreg program “Lithuania, Poland, Russia: 2007-2013”, “The Baltic Sea region” programme.

Nation states gradually lose their ability to solve their own economic, environmental, social, military, technical and other problems. One solution is to join efforts with other countries, as a rule, neighbouring ones. This explains the tendency towards regionalism, since it is easier to face increasing challenges shoulder to shoulder.

“Regionalism is one way of coping with global transformation, since an increasing number of states realise that they lack capability and means to manage such a task at the national level”, writes a Norwegian political scientist Björn Hettne.

At the same time, the process of European integration and enlargement of the European Union to the East created a completely new situation in the Russian Federation. Actually, the North-West territories of the Russian Federation became immediate neighbours of the enlarged European Union. Instead of bordering on number of countries, Russia deals now with the unified customs and border guard system of Brussels. At the same time, the EU actively and efficiently equips its new borders. A set of measures aimed against unauthorized entry into the EU, illegal migration, and cross-border crime have been taken. The logic of the undertaken measures is easy to explain, but, on the other hand, it will be rather difficult to sustain the earlier developed potential of cross-border cooperation.

The turning of the state borders with Poland and Lithuania into EU borders drastically changes the character, form and, partially, content of cross-border contacts. In other words, today we can already predict a significant decrease in passenger traffic in both directions, reduction of some segments of cross-border

tourist exchange and new complications in the field of joint investment, trade, industrial, cultural and technical assistance projects. The solution to this problem lies in concluding an agreement on local cross-border transit.

Besides, several years ago the EU launched the so-called European Neighbourhood policy towards new neighbours. One of the main objectives of this policy is enhancing stability, safety and well-being of the neighbouring countries by means of special programmes.

Currently, cross-border cooperation develops in two opposite directions: one is “consolidation” of the EU external borders, and the other — strengthening cooperation with the help of the Neighbourhood policy tools.

Cross-border cooperation in the Kaliningrad region has its own, though short, but rich history that started with its transformation into a Russian exclave on the Baltic Sea. Wide and diverse experience of interaction with the neighbours has been accumulated in the region. International projects contribute to solving common problems of the neighbouring territories through joint efforts. Almost all municipal institutions, dozens of nongovernmental organisations, business community and a number of public sector institutions are involved in cross-border cooperation. Among the tangible results of the INTERREG programme, one can mention the modernisation of the sewage treatment facilities in Guryevsk and Krasnoznamensk, the construction of a solid waste treatment plant in Gusev, efficient assistance to museums in Sovetsk, Ozyorsk and Svetlogorsk, and practical outcomes of some environmental projects. Comprehensive research into the prospective development of wind- and hydro-power engineering has been conducted alongside with establishing regular contacts in the spheres of culture, public healthcare, higher education, and tourism. We would like to especially mention the projects aimed at establishing segments of the future innovation system of the Kaliningrad region. Since 2004, 46 projects with the total budget of 8 million euros have been implemented in cooperation with Kaliningrad partners. This partnership has significantly contributed to the social and economical development of the region.

The Ministry of Territory Development and Interaction with Municipalities of the Kaliningrad region participates in one of the projects of the current INTERREG programme — “Russian-Polish Municipal Partnership as a Basis of Cross-Border Cooperation”. The project is aimed at analysing the Polish experience gained in the course of the municipal reforms and its potential application during the transition to the two-tier organisation of municipalities in the Kaliningrad region. The ministry also supports a number of projects aimed at researching investment capacity of the regional municipalities, at training specialists in drawing up project applications, at developing tourism in towns with intact Gothic castles. One of them is the “Window: an East-West” project, elaborated to stimulate the territorial integration of the North-West Russia into the Baltic Sea region by means of cooperative spatial planning and participation in projects in such priority spheres as business, transport, ICT, and sea area spatial planning. The general target of the project is to facilitate accelerated development of the Baltic Sea region by means of a more efficient use of the available potential of the territory. The achievement of this target will contribute to the social and economic development of both the Kaliningrad region and other regions of North-West Russia adjoining the Baltic Sea region.

The INTERREG programme has become an institutional basis for business cooperation supported by financial resources, transparent mechanism of their distribution, clear-cut procedures and agreed priorities, which, actually, create a new tailored model of cross-border cooperation with European guidelines, yet it takes into account the peculiarities of each territory.

Alongside other EU initiatives, the INTERREG programme contributes to the development of awareness and shared responsibility of the residents of the territory for the environment, sustainable and balanced development, and active cross-cultural dialogue — for everything that we call “shared Baltic values”. For the Kaliningrad region it means, first of all, that the region will enter the stream of globalisation changes typical of the whole Europe.

These processes take place with the help of networking and are closely linked to the essence of the programme and planned project activities, which result in special ‘network clusters’ with the participation of Kaliningrad organisations. These organisations can efficiently manage both the EU and internal funds for the development of the territory, as well as infrastructural and cultural unity of the Baltic Sea region.

It seems it is high time for collective solutions of the major problems conditioned by globalisation processes, climate change and unfavourable demographic changes. In connection with this, the region should use efficiently the resources and mechanisms offered in the framework of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, the European Territorial Cooperation and liberalisation of visa policy by means of the local cross-border transit regime.

The ministry will further support projects contributing to the ministry range of responsibilities, namely the analysis of migration and its influence on the labour market in the area of Russian-Polish-Lithuanian neighbourhood, improvement of ecological situation in the Neman river basin, advanced training of municipal employees, complex development of agricultural territories and the construction of water tourism infrastructure in a number of municipalities.

In the light of the new financial prospects, there emerges a need for harmonisation of the neighbouring territories’ regional development strategies. It is especially significant for the improvement of border crossing and trans-European transport corridor infrastructure, the efficiency of energy grids, environmental protection, migration flow management, and combating organised crime. In our opinion, the first stage of the new ‘Lithuania, Poland, Russia: 2007—2013’ programme should be dedicated to these strategic issues, which will allow to work on achieving the agreed targets in the course of the whole programme implementation period, given the peculiarities of the Russian-Polish-Lithuanian border area. The same importance is attached to the participation of the Kaliningrad region in the “Baltic Sea Region” programme, since it provides an opportunity of coordinating cooperation of all the Baltic States and regions.

Active and motivated cooperation in the projects and programmes and that of the partners on both sides of the border will significantly contribute to minimisation of neighbouring territories’ social and economical development disproportions. Efficient combination of the EU funds and Russian financial resources will help elaborate a new regional development technology in North-West Russia.